



FEMA

STRENGTHENING DISASTER RECOVERY FOR THE NATION



Strengthening Disaster Recovery for the Nation

VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (VTC)

REGION III

Time: October 28, 2009, Wednesday, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM (Eastern)

Participating Locations: FEMA Region III, District of Columbia,
Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania,
Virginia, West Virginia

Participation Via:

VTCs, Phone Bridge (only) and on WebEx

Sectors Represented:

**Federal and State agencies, nonprofits and
private sector and Tribal representation**

Note: This product is provided as a general summary only, not a transcript of the discussion.

Region III VTC Summary

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 28, 2009

Region III addressed questions through Group discussion. Facilitators asked for volunteers from different backgrounds to provide the first response to start the conversation. All questions were addressed.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

NOTE: Responses are by questions posed and are noted using the original sequencing.

Q1: How would you define a successful disaster recovery?

- Participants defined success, in part, as a “return to normal” and pre-disaster conditions. They noted that “back to normal” has many different aspects and level of detail.
- To determine if recovery is successful, Region III participants want to see:
 - **Services to citizens restored** so they can resume normal life and work.
 - **Positive public perceptions and reactions.** Participants noted that if citizens see government help, confidence goes up so visibility in recovery actions and decision-making is important to success. They also noted the importance of **effective, clear and honest communications** in gaining **public trust**. Disaster messaging needs to communicate **urgency** because urgency is needed in meeting citizen needs.
 - Significant **milestones** met including:
 - **Damage assessments complete.**
 - **Disaster Recovery Centers open.**
 - **Individual households program.**
 - **Closing housing programs at end of emergency management ops period.**
 - **Hazard mitigation grant programs in play.**
 - **Economic** viable, **environmental** responsibility, improved **resiliency** for future events.
 - Availability of **IT services** to help support community functions during response and recovery.
 - The needs of **vulnerable** and **at-risk populations** — children, families at-risk, people with disabilities, etc. — addressed.
 - **Lessons Learned** identified and implemented, noting this is yet another way to demonstrate good faith to citizens and build confidence.

Q2: Are there clear phases in the disaster recovery process that are useful milestones?

- Participants suggested that there are two (2) phases **defined by who provides support**: Initial support relying primarily on local government; followed by the arrival of State and Federal resources.

PHASES

RELIES PRIMARILY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT	ARRIVAL OF STATE and FEDERAL RESOURCES
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- Participants noted the **pre-deployment staging** of equipment and personnel resources and assets could be considered an early phase.
- Policy-makers at all levels need to **determine recovery benchmarks** and develop field operations guides for the Joint Field Office. Participants noted the following as **significant milestones**:
 - Assessments complete.
 - Basic services and key utilities restored.
 - People can go home and businesses re-open.
 - Disaster assistance is in the field.
 - Shelters closing.
 - Interim Housing moving to permanent Housing.
 - Insurance claims processed.
 - PWs (Project Worksheets) written and developed.
- While not a process phase, participants noted:
 - **Mitigation** against future disasters needs to be “woven” into the phasing discussion.
 - A **unified command** (JFO) to coordinate local, State and Federal partners is essential to successful recoveries.
 - **Crisis counseling grants** need timely approvals.

Q3: What features of Federal disaster recovery assistance are most important to you?

- Participants noted that **critical infrastructure, key resources, jobs and schools** need to be restored. Some participants feel there is **adequate funding** for getting families back in homes; infrastructure restored and drinking water and sewage treatment back on line. Others feel more funding is needed.
- Participants noted that Dept of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding **is flexible and can be reprogrammed** as needed. Waivers can be put in place for funding expenditures and matching. HUD is ready to move quickly with whatever recovering communities need.
- With regard to resources, one participant noted that on the **housing side**, resources are going to come from the Federal government.

- Region III participants expressed that “**better**” **planning** and **training** is need to ensure successful post-disaster recovery and remarked that **damage assessments** need to be complete, needs identified — both short- and long-term — and agencies with recovery resources need to be “**linked**” to needs.
- Region III participants said **partnerships** in the JFO are key to successful recoveries and that agencies need to **work together**.
- The ability to “**package**” assistance and Federal programs with other Federal programs, or State and local programs, is perceived as an important feature and one that can help communities and individuals achieve post-disaster conditions that exceed pre-disaster conditions. One participant said, “**We can do better.**” However, Region III participants note that packaging programs and resources is dependent in part, on **continued interaction** with individuals or local applicants. Participants want to see how the process can be **improved**.
- Participants also think citizens need **more information** to understand “what is happening.” They also expressed the need to create a culture of “**customer service**” to local and State governments and to individuals, suggesting a customer survey as a communications tool to improve service for future disasters. Follow-up can be electronically or by mail and part of the closeout phase.

Q4: How would you measure progress and what specific metrics should be considered for a successful disaster recovery?

- Region III participants measure success by tracking:
 - Number of families **back home** with basic services.
 - Families in **safe, secure housing** and community **services restored** (including schools).
 - People seeking **housing vouchers** can obtain them and receive housing.
 - Infrastructure needs identified and **funding for high priority projects secured**.
- Additional measurements of recovery success for this group include:
 - **Social environment** of populace is restored.
 - **Businesses are back** in operation, the food industry is back up, grocery stores are open and the economic component is in place.
 - Hospitals, clinics, **healthcare workers** and patient care beds restored.
 - On the environmental front: **Air and water quality are restored**.
 - Availability of **safe food**.
 - Restoration of the **spiritual community**.
- While not specific to the metrics, participants offered the following with regard to successful recoveries:
 - With regard to funding they want to see Individual Assistance (IA) and Public Assistance (PA) resources “**packaged**” **together** with other resources for individuals and public rebuilding when and where it makes sense to do so. They especially want resources “packaged” when considering addressing infrastructure needs.

- One participant noted the availability of Homeland Security grants and thought communities should consider developing target capabilities for preparedness, response and recovery using that funding stream. Participants want to see a metric defined for preparedness and response.
- Participants noted the need **for crisis counselors** on the street after a disaster and throughout recovery and feel communities might need help getting FEMA crisis counseling grants.

Q5: What are best practices in managing recovery from disasters?

- Participants want to see **effective recovery planning** that articulates **roles/responsibilities/resources**. They want planning to include assessing and surveying critical sector partners likely to be involved in recovery so strategies can focus and recovery processes are positioned to “roll out” when needed. Planning facilitates prioritizing issues and helps identify opportunities for the combining of resources in innovative and unique ways.
- Participants want:
 - IA/PA assistance “rolled out” in a more **integrated** way and greater integration of Federal recovery programs at the front end.
 - A **unified command** established at every level of government.
 - **Pre-disaster staging**, mobilization and restoration of electrical and other utility services and deployment of management teams to coordinate with utility companies to expedite needed to get power back on line.
 - Utilization of services tracked and real-time **tracking** of goods and services coming into jurisdictions.

Q6: What are the appropriate State, local and Tribal roles in leading disaster recovery efforts?

- Participants said **local authorities lead recovery**, including the planning process and pre- and post-disaster. State and Federal roles should supplement local recovery visions.
- They want citizens and stakeholders **empowered at every level** and the “right people” at the planning and decision-making table “for leading recovery at every level.”
- Participants also want to see:
 - State and local governments **spending** and **administering block grants**.
 - Local agencies **running voucher programs**.
 - When local resources are exhausted, recovery authorities **seek help from the next level**.
 - Local stakeholders serving as **communicators** and **facilitators** to nonprofits and service providers.

Q7: How can the nonprofit and private sectors be better integrated into recovery?

- Participants want to see:
 - **Pre-planning** at the local and State levels. Nonprofits and the private sector have a lot to offer when it comes to planning, especially housing planning. They should be included in recovery planning efforts and at recovery decision-making tables.

- **Education** and **partnership development** start early and to create TT&E (technical test and evaluation) opportunities.
- FEMA to examine business assistance with the **goal of achieving greater involvement** in recovery and private utilities and businesses included in the recovery planning conversation.
- A “**common site**” to explain, educate and provide programs for businesses to more easily access existing Small Business Assistance loan programs.
- Participants identified **three (3) strategies** for closer involvement with nonprofit and private sector partners:
 - Planning and recovery leadership need to return to a **collaborative model**.
 - Agencies and faith-based organizations need to be **empowered to participate**.
 - A **seamless transition** is needed for providing assistance among various groups, especially for individual assistance.
- **Communications** is important to building and maintaining connectivity with the nonprofit and private sectors. Participants think:
 - The lines of communication need to be **clear**.
 - Communications in the DRC need to be **streamlined**.
 - Nonprofits need to **create “top of mind” awareness** so recovery leadership does not overlook the important role they plan.

Q8: What are best practices for community recovery planning that incorporates public input?

- Strong public information and community outreach strategies **keep people informed**. Participants feel communications and outreach efforts need to be **constant** and the “right” partnerships with media are important to success.
- Participants think the Federal government needs to **listen to locals**, gather input and continually ask the question, “*What can we do better?*”
- Ongoing **coordination** with local government and NBHDS and coordination with community education and faith-based communities are important avenues for providing information and soliciting public involvement.
- Participants want to see **regional relationships** explored that include a wide array of partners. One person suggested looking at 13 counties, joining forces ahead of time to maximize effectiveness when a disaster occurs. **Chain of command issues with regard to communications** was acknowledged and participants want to see those worked out in a **transparent way**. Constituents would feed into the process.
- With regard to planning, participants noted that communities engage in comprehensive planning. They need to also engage in **disaster recovery planning** and engage early in the process.
- **Proactive involvement** of Continuity of Operations (COOP), Continuity of Government (COG), pre-disaster recovery training; unified Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA); surveys, public

meetings, grassroots councils, citizen corps, creation of regional Task Forces and inter-State Task Forces and training are strategies identified to **enhance public involvement** in the planning process, facilitate feedback and encourage participation.

- One participant noted that a “**greater informed public**” has better chances for recovery.
- Participants think it is important to do post-event evaluation that includes **citizen input**.

Q9: How can Federal, State and local disaster planning and recovery processes and programs be best coordinated?

- Participants discussed the need for **stakeholder involvement, inclusive participation** and the recurring need for **training**. More specially, participants suggested:
 - One participant suggested **round table meetings** headed by FEMA and including all recovery stakeholders for achieving better coordination.
 - Encourage **all partners to know all programs**. Conduct **training** and **tabletop exercising** and open training and exercising to all stakeholders.
 - One participant identified **Stafford Act Section 322 Plans** as having “a lot of good information” that can aid in recovery. *“We should utilize more.”*
 - Ensure Federal partners are included in **Long Term Recovery Task Forces** when organizing and planning.
 - Bring all **three (3) levels of authorities together**, four (4) when Tribal nations are involved, for evaluation and adjusting of plans as needed for different levels.
 - As long as stakeholders are involved, **utilize the JFO**, including at the planning stage.

Q10: As disaster recovery is primarily a State and local leadership issue, what are best practices for the timing (including start and end) and form of Federal assistance and coordination?

- Participants want to see:
 - Protocols, **standard operating procedures** should be outlined as preparation and be work shopped pre-disaster.
 - With regard to timing, one participant put it this way, *“Time is now. End is never.”*
 - Federal assistance begins with **training**.
 - Participants feel the **sooner Federal partners** are engaged the better.
 - **Recovery liaison** identified early.
 - **Early Declarations** and **quick** assessments.
 - **Rapid** start-up of disaster recovery assistance and involvement of FEMA and **minimal** “hassle” with Web-based application procedures.

Q11: What are the greatest capacity challenges that local and State governments face in disaster recovery and what are the best practices for increasing that capacity?

- Region III participants began this discussion with **donations management**. Participants noted the value of help in receiving and distributing donated dollars, clothing, recovery materials and volunteer hours.
- Participants discussed recovery resources, observing:
 - Available resources are a challenge to recovery. Participants want to know: “**What is the source of money?**”
 - Participants want to see **funding shortfalls** and addressed and **restrictive policies** addressed.
 - Resources need to be sufficient to address the **challenges** and policy needs to **facilitate access**.
 - Resources need to address **unmet human services needs** and the need to connect evacuees with resources.
 - Willing, available and **affordable housing** is a challenge. A potential solution was offered: Have Web-based housing lists and pass legislation to require landlords to accept disaster vouchers.
 - Citizens and local governments need a **case manager approach to speed recovery** and often funding is unavailable to support that need.
 - Staffing is a challenge. Communities may not have staffing capacity at the regional and city levels to sustain Long Term Recovery.
 - Participants also mentioned the need for **staff training** and staff and community **leadership training and skills building** to build local and personal capacity.
 - State employees do not have as much opportunity for training; less training funds available at State and local levels.
 - Capacity to provide services to address **mental health issues** and meet requirements and locate resources is a challenge. Participants noted that **recovery professionals** at county, local and State levels may be victims themselves and performing under the challenging circumstances of helping the community recovery while managing their personal recoveries.
- One participant noted the **Disaster Declaration** criteria may be a barrier for rural communities receiving assistance.
 - Gap analysis – address flooding – biggest hazard (in certain states).

Q 12: What are best practices for marshaling Federal assistance — both financial and professional support – to support State and local efforts to recover from a disaster, and how can we work together to better leverage existing Federal grant dollars?

- Participants want to see:
 - Leadership that is **proactive** and uses a **consensus-building approach**.
 - Leadership that is **knowledgeable** about what agencies have to offer and how to access resources.
 - Leadership that is trained on **roles** and **responsibilities** at every level of authority.

- They again said they want to see a **unified command structure**.
- Local, State and Federal officials **involved** in the operation of Disaster Recovery Centers.
- Uniform policies for the **distribution of funds** and **pre-disaster training on how to use funds**.
- Participants noted that **some agencies have authority, but no funds** at time of disaster putting their participation at risk. Participants want to see FEMA allocate resources to those agencies to ensure their help on the ground.
- Participants think that all agencies with a role at the JFO need **on-site staff**.
- Participants talked more about **planning** when considering Federal assistance and leveraging that assistance. One person noted, *“A plan that does not include electricity is not a plan.”*

Q13: What unmet needs are common to most disasters that do not seem to be adequately addressed under the current systems and programs?

- Participants noted the following unmet needs:
 - Providing services to individuals with **continued unmet needs**. (Committees are noted as non-existent.)
 - Funding for **volunteer agencies**.
 - **Federal agencies** authorized to support a disaster, but often no funding for that support.
 - More **training** for mitigation.
 - Resources for **long-term recovery committees**.
 - Resources to meet **power (utility)** needs.
 - **Schools** and **transitional housing**.
 - Help for **children** impacted by a disaster.
 - Assistance for **special-needs** populations.
 - **Pets**.
 - Resources for lower income populations and **legal immigrants** (if less than five [5] years in the country, they qualify for no Federal assistance).
 - Systemic response in meeting **human services needs**.
 - Resources to support disaster **case management**.
 - Help with Federal *Declaration* **preparation**.
 - FEMA **crisis counseling grants** (grants not always provided).
 - Resources to help **low-income populations** overcome the challenges of transitioning back due to limited resources. Participants think this should be examined and addressed.

Q 14: What are best practices for integrating economic and environmental sustainability into recovery?

- Participants want to see:
 - **Citizen and recovery leadership** with a realistic vision of what is appropriate for their community and a good process to identify and articulate a post-disaster vision.
 - **Pre-planning** with stakeholders to design and develop livable, sustainable communities. **Subject-matter Experts (SMEs)** are needed on the ground to help with economic and environmental sustainability and correct sectors need to be at the planning and decision table, pre-disaster.

- Job training opportunities to be included in recovery planning efforts, and expanded.
- IA/PA allowances or incentives for energy efficiency in rebuilding to make businesses and homes more sustainable to help achieve economic and environmental sustainability goals.
 - Make an eligible cost.
- Participants also discussed the need to “**follow our own rules**” and not let **waivers** issued during response follow into recovery.

Q15: What are best practices for integrating mitigation and resilience into recovery?

- Participants said that integration of mitigation and resiliency into recovery requires:
 - **Mutual strategies developed very early** – even before Declaration.
 - Expand beyond the JFO to include **other partners**.
 - Recovery planning that includes **long-term strategies** for making communities more resilient.
 - Proper planning, zoning and resiliency initiatives need to be **embedded in building codes** and integrated in to Public Assistance (PA) processes (including a simplified, single form “gateway.”)
 - Pre-disaster **mitigation training**.
 - Vigilance to be on the lookout for **rebuilding opportunities** to include mitigation techniques and ensure localities understand opportunities for funding and other support under mitigation programs.
- Participants want to see a best practices model that “**synchronizes**” Preliminary Damage Assessments/PA/IA/Organizational Assistance across country.

Q16: What else would you like us to know?

Responses to this question were directed to the Web site.